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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that Japanese education should place more emphasis on teaching students to write effectively in English. It notes that the Japanese Ministry of Education has put more emphasis in recent years in teaching students to listen and communicate orally in English. It is argued that in the age of the Internet, when so much information is expressed in writing, more emphasis needs to be placed on teaching students to communicate effective in writing. The ability to communicate precisely and quickly in written form is becoming more important in the Internet age. This paper reviews the English language teaching practices in Japan, analyzes the three main elements of communicative writing instruction, and introduces some practical applications and samples for teaching communicative writing in Japanese high schools. It is suggested that there are three key elements of communicative writing: real purpose, real audience, and linkage to reading. As the emphasis in English teaching in Japan shifts to "real communication" as the new "Course of Study" will be implemented nationally in 2002, too many Japanese teachers of English still rely on emphasizing the grammar and translation method. (Contains 33 references.) (KFT)

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Communicative Writing

Teaching Japanese High School Students to Use Writing to Communicate in English

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March, 2001

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COMMUNICATIVE WRITING

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COMMUNICATIVE WRITING

Teaching Japanese High School Students How to Use Writing to Communicate in English

INTRODUCTION

English language instruction in Japan, in every level from junior high school to university, has often been criticized, both inside and outside of the country. Many Japanese, even after ten years of studying English, find it very difficult to communicate in English. To change this unfortunate situation, the Japanese Ministry of Education has set some new overall objectives for foreign language instruction for senior high school students in the new "Course of Study" which will be implemented in 2002:

> To develop students' abilities to understand a foreign language and express themselves in it, to foster a positive attitude toward communication in it, and to heighten interest in language and culture, deepening international understanding (Japanese Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, p.119).

Moreover, in this "Course of Study," the Ministry of Education states specifically that more emphasis must be placed on developing students' communicative competence, especially in oral communication skills. Thus, more and more teachers now acknowledge the importance of listening and speaking skills.

However, in most Japanese high school classrooms, there is little instruction in writing in English for communication. Obviously, written communication skills are as important as oral communication skills. As we move into the 21st century, communication over computer networks is growing dramatically. It is extremely important for the Japanese to have the ability to write English communicatively in the age of the Internet. Without a doubt, good communicative writing ability will help the students to be successful in business and to enjoy their social lives. I believe that it is the time to change the old style teaching in Japan, especially in teaching writing, to focus on language as "communication." Because the speed and extent of communication (because of the Internet and e-mail) has dramatically changed, we Japanese must change our ways of communicating with non-Japanese. In international communication, especially through

e-mail or discussion boards, we must communicate precisely to avoid miscommunication. Very often, we must read and write at the same time for successful international communication. Therefore, the traditional, grammar centered-translation method is not sufficient in the 21st century.

As we head into the 21st century, we Japanese teachers of English need to prepare our students to write meaningful English that makes sense to an English speaking reader. We must put more emphasis on teaching writing more communicatively. In this paper I will discuss how Japanese teachers can help students to write more precisely, meaningfully, and communicatively. In Chapter I, I will introduce the current situation of English education in Japanese high schools and point out some major problems in the teaching of English, especially in English writing instruction. Chapter II establishes that writing in the real world is for communication and introduces three major elements of communicative writing instruction: real purpose, a real audience, and a linkage of writing to reading. In Chapter III, I will introduce some practical applications and samples for teaching communicative writing in Japanese high schools. These practical samples incorporate the three key elements of communicative writing: real purpose, real audience, and linkage to reading.

I. ENGLISH INSTRUCTION IN JAPAN: AT A TURNING POINT

A. The Current Teaching Situation

English language instruction in Japanese high schools today is at a transitional stage. Historically, English education in Japan has always put emphasis on "the study of language" rather than on "language for real communication." Indeed, English education in Japan has been grammar-translation centered instruction, as is noted by numerous scholars. For example, Shin (1999) notes that traditional English language instruction in China, Japan, and Korea has always emphasized gaining knowledge about English rather than using it communicatively (p.20). Gilfert (1999) explains the origin of foreign language education in Japan: the government leaders in the Meiji Era (1868-1912) decided that they needed to introduce institutions and advanced technology from the West and

therefore required students to gain reading/translation ability in languages such as German, French, and English (p.1). Even today, as Hirayanagi (1998) explains, in typical EFL classrooms in Japanese junior and senior high schools, the teachers put the emphasis on grammar rules, not on communicative competence (p.1).

Consequently, instruction in writing classes today tends to be grammar-translation centered as well, and students study English writing as a subject matter, not as a tool of communication. Numerous scholars, researchers, and critics have pointed out the problems of EFL writing instruction in Asian countries, including Japan. Raimes (cited by Shin, 1999) states "writing is seen as a means of reinforcing and manipulating grammatical and rhetorical structures, not as a tool for communicating with an audience and stimulating thinking about subject matter" (p.21). Gilfert (1999) describes the English "writing" or "composition" instruction method that is employed in most junior and senior high schools throughout Japan: students (1) memorize basic English sentence patterns and (2) practice by using the patterns to translate Japanese sentences (p.2). As a teacher of English in a public high school, I found her description very accurate. The traditional teaching method in Japanese junior and senior high schools does not prepare students to compose communicative English that they can use in the "real world." Indeed, Hirayanagi (1998) describes the unfortunate situation of many Japanese college students: That is, as a result of receiving non-communicative, grammar-translation based English language education in junior and senior high school, many college students have great difficulty producing descriptive and opinion paragraphs (p.4). Moreover, it is a sad fact that many college graduates in Japan have communication problems with English-speaking people, not just in oral, but also in written communication.

B. Origins of the Current Teaching Situation

Several circumstances have combined to create this situation. First and maybe the biggest problem is the large class size and the Japanese teachers' hectic work schedule. There are at least forty students in a single class, each teacher typically teaches three or four classes, and high school teachers in Japan have to play multiple roles: language teacher,

counselor, sports coach, janitor, security guard, and sometimes babysitter. These circumstances make it extremely difficult for teachers to find time to teach communicative writing classes. Second, one of the teacher's main roles is to prepare students for the notorious university entrance examination. As these examinations are simply not designed to test communicative competence, many English teachers stress accurate grammar knowledge so that students will pass these examinations. Third, Japanese students, generally speaking, are not exposed to authentic English materials and find little or no chance to use English in their everyday lives.

A fourth reason that writing lessons typically take a non-communicative approach is that native Japanese writing style is significantly different from English writing style, a fact which teachers and students alike may be unaware of. That is, there are deep communication style differences between Japanese and English, especially in writing. Many scholars point out that Japanese is a "reader (listener)-responsible language," whereas English is a "writer (speaker)-responsible language." For example, Hinds (1987) explains that, in communication in English, the sender (speaker or writer) has the main responsibility for successful communication (p.143). For communication in Japanese, on the other hand, the sender (writer or speaker) leaves some "gray zone" for the receiver (reader or listener) to supply in comprehending the message. In other words, many Japanese tend not to send 100% of what they want to say; they leave much of the responsibility for comprehension to the receiver. As English writing teachers, we need to help students to write using the communication styles of native English speakers. Students must understand that many native speakers of English will not understand their "grammatically perfect sentences" if they are not explicit in content. Students need to know that they must change their "Japanese mindset" when they write in English. Unfortunately, some Japanese writing teachers themselves are not fully aware of these differences or do not teach them to their students.

Lastly and most importantly, in explaining the current teaching situation in Japan today, many teachers neither have experience writing English communicatively themselves nor are trained to teach communicative writing. Although the importance of developing

students' listening and speaking skills is stressed in Japan these days, many teachers do not recognize the need for developing students' writing abilities. Because most English teachers in Japan received the traditional grammar-centered English education when they were students and because they do not have any experience in writing "communicative" English, they tend to teach in the ways in which they themselves were educated. To compound this problem, the writing textbooks used also tend to result in a grammar-translation, non-communicative focus. A typical section in a Japanese high school "writing" textbook begins with the introduction of new grammar patterns, some English sentences, and their translations in Japanese. Then, several sentences using the new grammar patterns are introduced. After that, there are some translation exercises. These textbooks are essentially "grammar-composition" textbooks and teachers need to have innovative ideas in order to use them successfully to teach communicative writing skills. As a result, many English teachers in Japan feel that it is "safer and easier" to conduct writing classes in the traditional way.

C. Recognition of the Need for Improvement

Recently the need for more communicative writing classes in Japan has been recognized. For example, in the "Course of Study" which will be implemented in 2002, the Ministry of Education calls for more communicative writing classes. Moreover, in this age of global communication, students need to write meaningful and precise English to communicate with non-Japanese people in everyday life. A recent survey in Time magazine shows that 65% of all Internet sites are written in English. (Cyberspeech, Time, June 21, 1997, p.23). In other words, students need to reply to English language questions, or to ask questions in English after they read these sites. Moreover, as English is becoming the "international language," the ability to produce many kinds of writing products in English such as precise memos, instructions, and different kinds of letters is essential in the age of globalization. Without a doubt, the ability to read and write English for real communication is extremely important for students' success in their lives. As English teachers, we must improve our ways of teaching English writing so that students

will gain the communicative writing skills needed to enjoy successful communication with English speakers from all over the world.

II. THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH TO TEACHING WRITING: THREE KEY ELEMENTS

A communicative approach to teaching writing rests on the premise that writing is *used* in the real world in certain ways and that the writing class should parallel these uses. Most notable are the notions that truly communicative writing involves (1) purpose or meaning, (2) audience, and (3) a link to reading.

A. Purpose or Meaning

The first and most important concept of communicative writing is writing for a specific purpose, writing meaningfully. It is the fact that, in the real world, we write because we have some purpose in writing, some meaning to convey. Successful writers think of the purpose of writing in order to communicate successfully. Thus, students, too, will be able to write more communicatively if they know the purpose of their writing. Indeed, students need to understand the purpose *before* they can write precise English for their readers. Thus, it is extremely important to create an authentic purpose for writing when we prepare any writing task or activities for the students. Many language teaching experts emphasize the need for writing tasks to have meaning or purpose. For example, Reid (1993) stresses that activities should be purposeful in the language classroom (p.39). Raimes (1983) is another well-known expert who points out the importance of making the language classroom tasks as meaningful as possible for the reader and the writer (p.16). Undoubtedly, students will be motivated if their writing tasks are meaningful. Particularly because writing is probably the most difficult task in language acquisition in any language, classroom activities must ensure that the students use English in a "meaningful" way so that these activities will help them to write English with confidence (Raimes, 1983, p.14). Without a doubt, the teacher must provide as many authentic purposes for writing as possible for students in successful communicative writing classrooms: Ensuring a real

purpose for all writing tasks will spark students' interest in writing and will give them a reason and the confidence to write English clearly for their readers.

B. Real Audience

The second important concept of communicative writing is writing for a real audience. As we write for the audience or the reader in everyday life, it is also extremely important for the students to know who their readers are when they write in the classrooms. As is described by Raimes (1983), the presence of a real reader helps the writer set the goal of his writing (p.17). She further states that in any communicative class, it is very important to explain to the students who they are writing for so that students realize that the purpose of their writing is "communication with that reader" (p.18). The importance of a real audience in communicative writing classes is voiced by many other educators as well. Reid (1993) summarizes the suggested criteria for the selection of classroom activities reported by many teachers and researchers; they point out that context should be meaningful and that the students must clearly understand their audience (p.151). Furthermore, Ishihara (1996) stresses the importance of providing students with a sense of audience as it creates "a greater sense that writing is a social activity closely linked to the human life" (p.4). In short, it is essential for the students to understand who their readers are in order to write communicatively. As teachers, we must present students with a "clear" audience, whether "real" or "imaginary," for successful communicative writing.

C. Linkage to Reading

Reading is a third element that should play a central role in teaching communicative writing. Many researchers point out the important link between reading and writing in general: overall, good readers tend to be good writers. There is considerable research evidence that extensive readers read and write much better than those who do not read extensively (Stotsky, 1983; Krashen, 1993; Ferris and Hedgcock, 1998). Scott (1996) summarizes the research results by saying that students who read well have better understanding of the principles and characteristics of writing (p.10). Ferris and Hedgcock (1998) emphasize that both L1 and L2 readers unconsciously develop a better

writing ability from "long-term, self-initiated reading" (p.24). They continue, noting the positive influence of academic and leisure reading on both L1 and L2 development among *all* ages (p.22). It is clear from the research that reading activities foster good writing abilities.

This link between reading and writing in general is particularly important for L2 students learning how to write communicatively. Indeed, it is the third key element of communicative writing: writing is meant to be ***read*** by a reader-if the ***meaning*** is to be communicated to an ***audience***. In other words, an exchange of meaning between writer and audience is normally accomplished through reading. There are many ways in which reading interacts naturally with writing. For example, as mentioned by Cross (1992), writing responses to what has been read is a very common writing activity (p.268). Reid (1993) also stresses that reading and writing are fundamentally connected; good writers read before and after they write (p.64). That is, reading is linked naturally to writing for the purpose of communicating meaning to an audience.

III. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH TO TEACHING WRITING: FOUR CATEGORIES OF ACTIVITIES FOR USE IN JAPAN

As most Japanese high school students do not have much real opportunity or need to write English outside of school at this stage of their lives, it is very important that English teachers work hard to provide them with truly communicative writing tasks. A great variety of activities exist to teach communicative writing --- all incorporating ***purpose***, ***audience***, and linkage to ***reading***. Moreover, each of these can be adapted for use in English classrooms in Japan. Four major kinds of communicative writing activities will be presented in this section: A. Writing Instructions; B. Writing Autobiographies; C. Writing Letters, and D. Writing E-mails to "Key Pals."

A. Writing Instructions or Directions

One kind of activity that quite naturally incorporates the elements of communicative

writing is writing instructions or directions. For example, Ann Raimes, in a very useful book, Techniques in Teaching Writing (1983), outlines this sort of exercise. Her suggestion is that students write instructions for each other as to how to get from the school to their homes. The readers then ask questions if they need to (p.92).

Adaptation for use in English classes in Japan

Following is an example of how Raimes' suggestion can be adapted for use in Japan. Real purpose and real audience are ensured by making the directions addressed to the ALT.

Sample Lesson for Japan #1: Writing Instructions

Procedure:

1. Students are divided into groups of four. The teacher assigns each group what to write to help their ALT to get around in the city. Alternatively, students can write some useful instructions for foreign residents in the city. For example, they can write how to get to a certain tourist attraction by local bus or car, how to find restrooms in the downtown shopping street, or how to open a bank account.
2. Students write instructions. They can draw a map if they want to.
3. Students exchange their products with members in other groups. They exchange comments and suggestions. They add more information if they need to.
4. After finishing the final draft, they give it to the ALT.
5. The ALT gives the evaluation.

Handout 1-1

How to get to Kokusai Street from School

(By bus)

1. Go out from the main gate. Turn right and you will see a bus stop.
2. Take a #89 bus. Get off at the bus terminal in Izumizaki.
3. Find a sign that says "Kokusai Dori." Or ask any local person. Anyone can tell you.
4. Walk about 5 minutes along the main road. You will see a big shopping building (look for RYUBO sign). Now you are the entrance of Kokusai Street.

(By car)

1. Turn left at the main gate.
2. Turn right at the corner of the gas station.
3. Follow Route 331. After driving for about 2 kilometers the road becomes Route 58. Follow Route 58 until you see the bus terminal on the right. Turn right at Izumizaki intersection. Turn left at the KOKUSAI ST. sign. Now you are on Kokusai Street.

This activity is very good for students, as it provides a clear real ***purpose*** for which they will need to use many language skills. Most importantly, they need to write step by step so that native English speakers will understand their writing, because the ***audience*** is real. In doing the task, they must ***read*** and reread their English while they write. Furthermore, publishing students' work in a booklet form to be presented to the ALT or to other international residents in the city will raise students' motivation to write clear and meaningful English.

B. Writing Autobiographies

Writing and publishing an autobiography can be another excellent communicative Activity. Sandra Okura DaLie in Dorret (2001) presents a practical writing activity called "Personal Timelines."

Materials:
-Large white paper for each student in the class.

Objectives:
-Help students reflect on the events that have had an impact on their lives.
-Students learn to write informative paragraphs.
-Students gain presentation skills.

Procedures:
1. Start with a writing assignment. Ask the students to think of ten events in their lives that have had a major impact on them. Have them write a paragraph for each one, explaining what happened, why they consider it important, and how it has influenced who they are as a person.
2. Have the students condense each paragraph to a one-line caption.
3. Distribute white paper, preferably 11x17 inches or larger.
4. The students draw a line across the center of the page. This line will become the timeline. Have them divide the line into time increments that fit their life span.
5. The students can then draw or use symbols to represent the events they described in the initial writing assignment. Then they glue the illustration to the appropriate place on the timeline.
6. The students write their captions underneath each picture.
7. The students can show their timelines and read their paragraphs to each other (p.55).

Adaptation for use in English classes in Japan

A similar activity, "Let's write an autobiography" is a communicative writing activity suitable for Japanese high school students. It incorporates the three key elements of communicative writing: a meaningful purpose, an audience, and a link to reading.

Sample Lesson for Japan #2: Let's Write an Autobiography

Materials:
-Large white paper.
-Felt-tip pens.
-Pictures of their childhood or elementary/junior high school days.

Objectives:
-Help students reflect on their childhood.
-Students learn to write informative paragraphs.
-Students gain presentation skills.

Procedures:
1. Announce to the students that they are going to write autobiographies about their early childhood. Tell them they must choose to write about a single selected time period, not their whole lives, for example, only from birth to kindergarten, or only their elementary school days.
2. The teacher writes a list of ideas on the board in English as examples of what kind of things they can include in their autobiographies.
3. The students write questions to ask their parents/relatives to gather information about their childhood. (Worksheet 2-1). All students share their questions in class.
4. The students ask their parents/relatives/neighbors questions and write their first drafts. They also collect their photographs or drawings from their childhood. They can use them in their paper and presentation.
5. The students read friends' first drafts and give comments using a peer evaluation form (Worksheet 2-2). The students rewrite their first drafts if they can.
6. The teacher and the ALT check the students' first drafts and gives comments. Correct grammatical errors if necessary.
7. The students present part of their autobiographies in front of the class. They are encouraged to use the photographs, videotapes, and drawings from their childhood. In this stage they can learn oral presentation skills.
8. Each student binds his/her autobiography into a nice book. They can exchange them with their friends and give them to their parents as a gift.

Worksheet 2-1

Remember your childhood or ask your parents/relatives about your childhood. Fill in this form to prepare to write your autobiography. There are 6 questions on this form and you need to make at least 9 more questions.

1. When is your birthday?
2. Where were you born? (Which city? In the hospital? At home?)
3. Who named you?
4. What kind of baby were you? What was your personality when you were a baby? (Happy, sensitive, easy-going, tense, etc.)
5. Did you sleep well when you were a baby? Did you eat a lot?
6. What is the name of the nursery school / day care / kindergarten you attended?
7.
8.
9.
10.
11.
12.
13.
14.
15.

Worksheet 2-2

Peer-evaluation Form

1. Do you understand clearly what the writer wants to say?
2. Do you have any questions for the writer?
3. Do you have any suggestions to the writer to make the autobiography more interesting?
4. Comments and suggestions to the writer.

C. Different kinds of letter writing activities

Letter writing is a third type of activity that can be used to promote communicative writing, since it naturally includes a message, an audience, and a link to reading. Here I will present three types, each with a "Sample Lesson for Japan": (1) Letter of Introduction, (2) Send That Postcard, and (3) Letter to a Legislator.

1. Letter of Introduction

Teryne Dorret (2001) presents a useful letter writing activity.

Materials:
-Copies of your letter of introduction for each student.
-Questions to guide the students with their own letters of introduction.

Objectives:
-To get to know each other (teachers and students) better in the early part of the semester.
-To give students a good sample of introductory letter writing.
-To do an initial assessment of students' writing.

Procedure:
1. Prepare a letter to introduce yourself to the students. (Appendix #1) Write the letter in a simple fashion so students can model their letters after yours.
2. Give the letter to the students. Read the letter aloud to the students if you wish, or tell them informally about what you wrote in the letter. Answer any questions they might have about you.
3. The students write their own letters of introduction to you using questions to guide their letters. (Appendix #2) (pp.11-14).

Adaptation for use in English classes in Japan

This writing activity is very suitable for writing classes in Japanese high schools. As one English teacher teaches as many as 160 students, it is extremely difficult to build good relationships with each student. Thus, both the teacher and the students will benefit from this activity; they both get to know each other better. Moreover, the teacher can evaluate each student's writing ability right at the beginning of the term. The teacher can also teach the important concepts of communicative writing, namely, the importance of writing for real ***purpose*** and ***audience***. Moreover, the teacher's own letter of introduction

introduces a natural link to reading and provides a writing sample that students can follow. Afterward, students can exchange letters with their new classmates to get to know each other better, also providing a natural link to ***reading***.

Sample Lesson for Japan #3: Letter of Introduction

Letter of Introduction

Materials:
-Copies of your own letter of introduction for each student.
-Questions to guide the students with their own letters of introduction.

Objectives:
-To get to know each other (teacher and students) better in early part of the term.
-To give students a good sample of introductory letter writing.

Procedure:
1. Prepare a letter to introduce yourself to the students. (Handout 3-1) Write the letter in a simple fashion so students can model their letters after yours.
2. Give the letter to the students. Read the letter aloud to the students if you wish, or tell them informally about what you wrote in the letter. Answer any questions that they might have about you.
3. Give the students Appendix 2 with its list of questions to guide their letters.
4. Using those questions to guide their letters, the students write their own letters of introduction to you. They can also exchange letters with their new classmates to get to know each other better.
5. The students then write a second letter to introduce one of their friends to the class. They read the letter in front of the class.

Handout 3-1

April 7, 2001

Dear Students,

Let me introduce myself. My name is Yoshikazu Matsubara and I will be your writing teacher this year. I have been teaching at this school for 7 years. I teach English I and Writing classes.

I was born and grew up on Miyako Island. After I graduated from a local high school on the island I graduated from Obirin College, a small private college in Tokyo. I studied at Whittier College in California for a year during my junior year.

I live in Kanagusuku, very close to JUSCO supermarket. I am 35 years old and I am married. I live with my wife, a son, and a daughter.

I enjoy traveling. I have traveled to the Mainland China, Taiwan, Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, the United States, Canada and England.

Please write me your letter of introduction. You can ask me questions about myself in the letter, too. I am looking forward to working with you this year. Also, I am looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Yoshikazu Matsubara

2. Send That Postcard

Shawn Clankie in White (1995) presents a variation on letter writing, namely writing postcards.

Materials:
-One blank stamped postcard per student
-One handout of the addresses of state tourist boards per student
-One handout of the format per student

Objectives:
-To give students a practical reason for writing for which they will receive some benefits.
-To teach students the formats of postcard writing.
-To teach how to write letters to request something.

Procedure:
1. Begin by asking what states the students have visited and what they did and saw. Then ask them which states seem interesting to them. (Announce that students will have the opportunity to write to a state to request tourist information.) Tell students that they must pick one state to request information from and to bring one blank stamped postcard to the next class.
2. During the next class, go around the room asking which states were selected. Ask some students why they selected that state.
3. Demonstrate the format by first drawing two large rectangles on the blackboard. In the rectangles, create the sample postcards.
4. Hand out the list of addresses to each student along with a copy of the format and allow the students about 10 minutes to fill in their postcard.
5. Collect postcards and mail after class (pp. 230-232).

Adaptation for use in English classes in Japan

This activity is particularly effective in establishing a clear purpose and real audience and can be easily adapted for use in Japan.

Sample Lesson for Japan #4: Send That Postcard

Materials:
-One blank stamped envelope per student
-One handout of the addresses of state tourist boards in the United States per student; or access to the website of the National Council of State Tourism Directors: http://www.tourstates.com
-One handout of the format per student

Objectives:
-To give students a practical reason for writing, from which they will receive some benefits.
-To teach students the structural formats of request letter writing.
-To teach how to write letters to request something.

Procedure:
1. After the students have studied an English-speaking country in their history or geography class (the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand), the teacher can introduce this writing activity in the English class. (Announce that students will have the opportunity to write to a state to request tourist information.)
2. Each student picks the name of a state or provincial tourism office by lottery. Tell the students to bring one blank airmail envelope and a 110 yen stamp.
3. Give each student the list of addresses of State Tourism Offices or the Website. http://www.tourstates.com (Sheet 4-1)
4. Explain to the students about the format of the semi-formal letter.
5. When the students finish, collect the letters to check the errors.
6. The students make final corrections and mail the letters.

As most students have never traveled to foreign countries, the teacher may need to select the English speaking country for this activity. This kind of information request writing activity will appeals to students because they will actually receive tour guidebooks or pamphlets from a board of tourism. In this activity, the teacher can teach the basic form of semi-official letter writing and the format of writing postcards or envelopes. After they receive travel information from different states or provinces, they can write their own reports about them.

Sheet 4-1

Welcome to Tourstates.co

The official web site of **National Council of State Tourism Directors**

Planning a vacation or a business trip? Questions about where to go, how to get there, where to stay and what to do can all be answered by state/territorial tourism offices.

- Click on the state on the map below, or
- Click on the state or territory in the listing below

C. U.S. States

Alabama | Alaska | Arizona | Arkansas | California | Colorado | Connecticut | Delaware | Florida | Georgia | Hawaii | Idaho | Illinois | Indiana | Iowa | Kansas | Kentucky | Louisiana | Maine | Maryland | Massachusetts | Michigan | Minnesota | Mississippi | Missouri | Montana | Nebraska | Nevada | New Hampshire | New Jersey | New Mexico | New York | North Carolina | North Dakota | Ohio | Oklahoma | Oregon | Pennsylvania | Rhode Island | South Carolina | South Dakota | Tennessee | Texas | Utah | Vermont | Virginia | Washington | West Virginia | Wisconsin | Wyoming

U.S. Territories

American Samoa | Guam | Marianas | Puerto Rico | U.S. Virgin Islands | Washington D.C.

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3. Letter to a Legislator

Another letter writing activity is one utilized by Mr. Jerry Burks, an English teacher from the United States working on Okinawa, Japan, who has his students write to political figures.

Adaptation for use in English classes in Japan

I have expanded and adapted this basic idea into a fully communicative writing activity.

Sample Lesson for Japan #5: Letter to a Legislator

Materials:
-One blank piece of writing paper and a stamped envelope per student
-One handout of the addresses of the United States Senators and Congresspersons
-One example letter per student

Objectives:
-By writing a letter to a real Senator or a Congressperson in the United States and asking questions about his/her state and the United States, students learn how to write with a real purpose and audience in mind.
-Students learn how to use language forms such as the past tense, future tense, polite language, and wh questions in a real situation.
-Students learn the formats of the formal letter. They also learn how to express themselves in the formal letter.

Procedure:
I. Pre-writing activities
Brainstorming
Students are divided into groups of five (8 groups total). Four groups brainstorm about the things they would like to tell about themselves and their home island. The other four groups brainstorm about the things they would like to ask about the Senator's or the Congressperson's state and the United States in general. After the group work, the teacher writes their ideas on the blackboard and discusses the ideas with the students. (Sheet 5-1)

Pair Work
After brainstorming, students write short sentences using target forms. (The present perfect tense, the use of polite language, and wh questions.) After the pair work, the students read their sentences and the teacher writes them on the blackboard. (Sheet 5-2)

Deciding on which Senator or Congressperson to write a letter to
Each student chooses the name of a Senator or a Congressperson to write a letter to by a lottery. The teacher uses a map of the United States on the board to help students understand the geography. Since there are 100 Senators in the United States each student can write to a different Senator. Students can check the name and the mailing address of the Senators / the Congresspersons and other useful information at: http://www.senate.gov
The names of the congresspersons and other useful information at: http://www.house.gov

Individual Work
Each student writes a short letter to a Senator using target forms and other grammatical sentences that they have learned previously. The teacher introduces an example letter to the students before they do the individual work. After individual work, the teacher collects the letters and introduces some to the students.

Introduction of the official letter format and the way to write the address on the envelope using a transparency (Sheet 5-3)

II. Writing the first draft
The students write the first draft of the letter to Senators or the Congresspersons. The teacher helps only when students' have major difficulties during this writing activity.

III. Peer-evaluation
After finishing the first draft the students exchange their letters and evaluate each other's work using a peer-evaluation form. (Sheet 5-4)

IV. Writing the second draft
Students write the second draft with the help of the peer-evaluation form. After the students hand in their second drafts, the teacher checks their letters using a holistic scoring rubric (Sheet 5-5), and gives comments. The students revise their letters, and write the final drafts.

V. Mailing the letters
After they finish writing the final drafts, the students write mailing addresses on the envelopes. The teacher does the final check and mails their letters to the Senators or the Congresspersons.

VI. Post-writing activity
After the students receive the reply from the Senators or the Congresspersons, the teacher publishes the students' letters and the replies from the Senators/the congresspersons.

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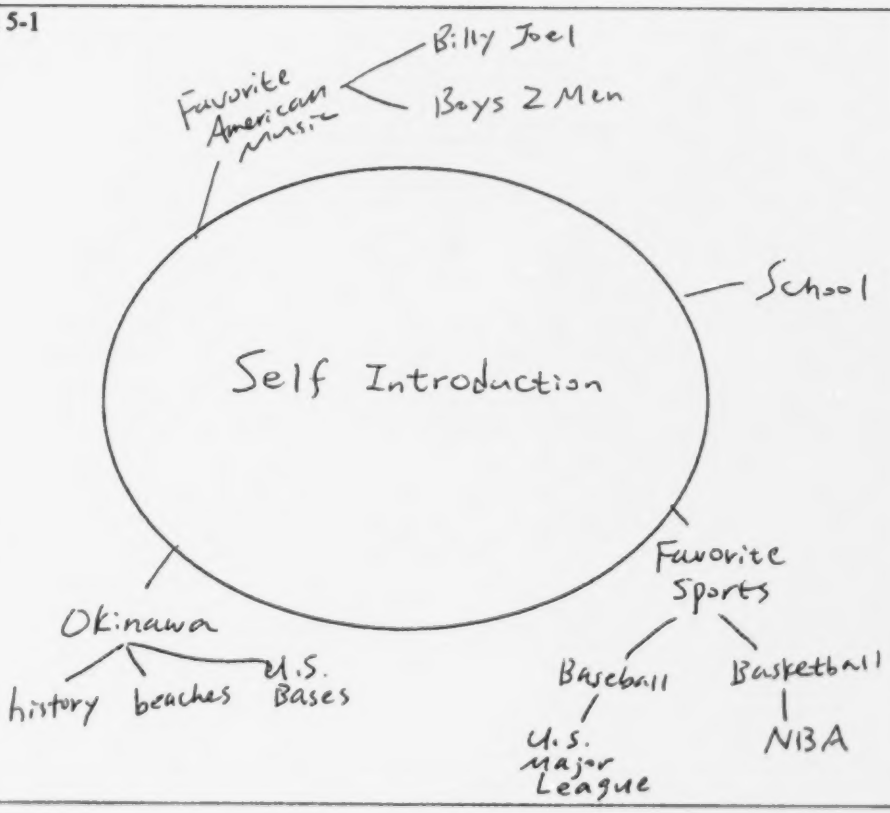
Sheet 5-1



Sheet 5-2

Hello. My name is Taro Miyagi. I am a 16-year-old high school student. I have been studying English for five years and I am interested in learning more about America. I like to play baseball. Are there any professional baseball teams in your state? In Okinawa, we have very beautiful beaches. What is the most popular sightseeing spot in your state?

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Sheet 5-3: Examples of the official letter format and writing addresses on the envelope.

3-5-1 Kanagusuku
Naha-shi, Okinawa 901-0155
JAPAN

Senator Spencer Abraham
United States Senate
329 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 29510
USA

Dear Sir,

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Taro Miyagi. I am a 16-year-old high school student from Okinawa, Japan. I like to play baseball. My favorite subject is P.E. ……

There are many beautiful beaches in Okinawa……

I would be happy to receive a reply with your autograph.

Respectfully,

Taro Miyagi

Taro Miyagi

Taro Miyagi
3-5-1 Kanagusuku
Naha-shi, Okinawa 901-0155
JAPAN

Senator Spencer Abraham
United States Senate
329 Dirkson Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
USA

Sheet 5-4: Peer-evaluation Form

Peer-evaluation Form

Your name
Your partner's name

1. Do you understand what the writer wants to say? Do you have any questions for the writer?

2. Do you have any suggestions to the writer to make the letter more interesting?

3. Does the writer correctly fill out the official letter format?

4. Does the writer use a pre-closing at the end of the letter?

5. Comments and suggestions to the writer.

Sheet 5-5: Holistic Scoring Rubric for Writing Assignment

Level 4: Conveys meaning clearly and effectively
Develops logical paragraphs
Use precise vocabulary
Writes with few spelling and grammatical errors

Level 3: Writes primarily simple sentences
Writes with vocabulary that is adequate for the purpose
Still uses high frequency vocabulary
Writes with many spelling and grammatical errors

Level 2: Writes simple sentences only
Begins to write with vocabulary that is adequate for the purpose
Often uses high frequency vocabulary

Level 1: Begins to convey meaning
Writes with simple sentences
Frequently makes spelling and grammatical mistakes
Use little or no mechanics

D. E-Mail Exchanges with "Key Pals"

Besides writing instructions, writing autobiographies, and writing letters, another activity that offers many advantages for Japanese high school students is exchanging e-mails with "key pals" or pen pals in English speaking countries. This activity nicely incorporates authentic ***purpose***, ***audience***, and ***reading***. A typical lesson of this type is offered by John Wong (1997).

Materials:
-Computer and e-mail access for each student.
-Word-processing software (optional).

Objectives:
-Increase writing fluency.
-Write for an authentic audience.

Procedures:
1. Before the semester begins, join an international e-mail list such as Intercultural E-Mail Classroom Connections. Decide on the objectives of your e-mail project, and post a message to the list stating them and requesting a partner class. State clearly the type of class you want, including the grade level.
2. After you are assigned a partner classroom, send a list of your students' names and e-mail addresses to your partner teacher so that he or she can match up student key pals. (Or ask your partner teacher to send you his or her list so that you can match them up.) Type up the list before the class.
3. In class, introduce the activity. Explain the e-mail system to students new to e-mail. Have them write their introductory message, send it to their partner, and save it to a floppy disk for future reference.
4. Make it clear that you expect the students to communicate with their keypals at least once a week. After the first exchange, encourage the students to explore various topics for future discussion with key pals. If possible, have them incorporate their discussion into their course essays (in Boswood, Tim (Ed), p.92).

Adaptation for Use in Japan

An e-mail exchange program seems especially beneficial for high school students in Japan. Since Japan is an isolated monolingual country, it is difficult for the students to find real readers to write to. A pen-pal program is one idea for a communicative writing activity. However, the main problem with pen-pal programs is the fact that regular mail

takes too long to reach the destination. As students have to wait at least seven to ten days to receive a reply, many of them lose interest in exchanging letters. Thus, an e-mail exchange program will surely attract students as it is very close to "real time" communication. Moreover, most students enjoy new technology and high-speed transmission.

Sample Lesson for Japan #6: E-mail Exchanges with "Key Pals"

Materials:
-Computer and e-mail access. (One computer with Internet access per student is ideal. However, because the number of computers connected to the Internet is sometimes limited in Japanese high schools, students can write their letters with a word processing program, give them on diskette to the teacher, and the teacher can send the emails to each of the students' "key-pals.")

Objectives:
-Apply their knowledge of English vocabulary and grammar to the real use of language.
-Increase writing fluency.
-Write for an authentic audience.
-Make friends in foreign countries and understand another culture better.

Procedures:
1. Before the new term begins, join an international e-mail list such as Intercultural E-Mail Classroom Connections (http://www.iecc.org) or Dave's ESL Café (http://www.eslcafe.com). Decide on the objectives of your e-mail project, and post a message to the list stating them and requesting a partner class. State clearly what type of class you want, including the grade level.
2. After you are assigned a partner classroom, send a list of your students' names and e-mail addresses to your partner teacher so that he or she can match up student keypals. (Or ask your partner teacher to send you his or her list so that you can match them up.) Type up the list before the class.
3. Alternatively, because many high schools in Okinawa have "sister" schools in the United States, the teacher may set up a "key pal" exchange program with the sister school. This arrangement is especially good because some students can meet each other when they visit the sister school.
4. As an additional possibility, the teacher can set up a "key pal" exchange program with American schools on Okinawa (Department of Defense Schools or private schools). This arrangement may be very beneficial both to Japanese and American students as they can relate to similar things (local food, parks, beaches, and shopping spots).
5. Once all students are matched up with "key pals", give them a writing task every week.

For example, the teacher can assign the students things to write about. Ten possible topics might be: (1) self introduction (2) family (3) friends (4) hobbies (5) school life (6) favorite sports (7) favorite music (8) favorite kinds of movies (9) introduction of Okinawa (10) their future plans.

6. The teacher may assign an e-mail writing task with grammar focus. For example, after students learn about the present perfect progressive tense, the teacher can construct an assignment that will encourage students to write email using a new grammar pattern such as "I have been studying English for 4 years."
7. Students can exchange their e-mails with other classmates for peer evaluation before they send them to their American "key pal." The teacher may read their emails and help with their grammatical mistakes or awkward sentences.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that the English language instruction in Japanese high schools today is at a transitional stage. The Ministry of Education has introduced a new "Course of Study" which will be implemented in 2002 stressing the importance of teaching English as a tool for "real" communication. Moreover, last year, Mr. Obuchi, the former Prime Minister of Japan, made a proposal that English be made the official second language of Japan. Although his proposal seems unrealistic, it clearly shows that we Japanese English teachers need to prepare our students to study English as a tool of communication.

In Japanese schools, recently, much emphasis has been placed on Oral Communication, learning to listen and speak communicatively. Nevertheless, many teachers still teach writing in a traditional way, using a grammar-oriented translation method. Can we continue to keep our traditional way of teaching English writing? It is a fact that the world is getting smaller and smaller. The number of people who travel to foreign countries is increasing greatly. Moreover, international communication through computer networks is dramatically increasing. I believe it is the time for Japanese English teachers to change the teaching of writing so that writing can be a tool for real communication with English readers. When we teach writing, we Japanese English teachers must work to include the three key elements of real written communication --- ***purpose***, ***audience***, and a link to ***reading*** --- in order to promote our students' ability to write English more communicatively.

Communicative writing is becoming essential for students' success in the professional world. Thus, we Japanese teachers of English must help our students to gain communicative writing skills so they can be successful communicators wherever they go during their lives.

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All About Me

Let me introduce myself. My name is _____ and I will be your _____ teacher this semester. I have been teaching at _____ for _____ years. I teach _____ classes. I have also taught _____.

I like teaching very much because _____. It's also a big challenge to be a good teacher. It's never boring because every day is different.

Sometimes teaching is difficult because it's a lot of work. The one thing that I really don't like about teaching is _____.

Before I became a teacher, I was _____. I _____ and I _____. Then I worked _____.

I live in _____, not far from _____. I am _____ years old and I am single/married. I live with _____.

After school and on the weekends, I often _____. When I'm not working, I _____. I enjoy _____ because it _____. I also like to _____.

I'm really looking forward to this semester with you. This is one of my favorite classes to teach because I love writing and it's very exciting to help other people learn how to write.

I hope you will also enjoy this class. I will try to make it fun and interesting for you. The lessons I've planned should help you feel more comfortable expressing your ideas in writing. You should also gain the writing skills you need to become a better, more fluent writer in English.

I hope we can all work together to make this a great semester for everyone in the class.

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Letter of Introduction Questions

Paragraph 1: Personal and Family

1. What is your name?
2. In what city do you live?
3. Where were you born?
4. Whom do you live with?
5. Do you have any pets?

Paragraph 2: School History

6. How long have you been going to this school?
7. What do you like about the school?
8. What don't you like about the school?
9. What classes are you taking this semester?

Paragraph 3: Hobbies and Interests

10. Do you have any hobbies? What are they?
11. What do you usually do after school?
12. What do you do on the weekends for fun?
13. What is your favorite thing to do with your friends?

Paragraph 4: This Class

14. What do you like about writing?
15. What don't you like about writing?
16. What writing activities do you want to do in this class?
17. What do you want to learn in this class?

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